

Curling, Before

by Gabriella Brand

Back then, folks living on each side of the border
used to play the game together.
One sheet of ice between them, a couple of brooms,
eight spinning granite stones.

All along Lake Mephrémagog, neighbors would
turn up on a Saturday night, coming from one town or another.
With their grippers and their sliders,
their Anglo-Saxon curses and their *tabernaques*.

Side by side, they'd curl away the winter, bleak and long.

Inside the clubhouse, *les éclats*, *les blagues*, the gentle ribbings,
the rise of steam from a thermos of shared coffee.
Under the soft yellow lights, one couldn't tell a maple leaf from
a star, the *fleur de lys* from a stripe.

Back then, there were no checkpoints. Not really.

A sleepy *douanier*, perhaps. A wave of the hand as Vermonters freely crossed the
pines. A nod of the head as Quebeckers sauntered onto Main Street.
Neighbors, *emmitouflé* or buttoned-up, just walked across
the bridge to cheer each other on.

Maybe they still curl on the Quebec side, or maybe they don't.
Maybe it's cold and quiet there, dark, like it is here.